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THE WONDERS OF THE BIBLE (PT. 2)

HEBREWS 4:12

IT HAS BEEN A GREAT JOY FOR ME TO SHARE THE MATERIAL in this two-part article in the Bible Conference Ministry. This second part, in fact, has been an even greater blessing to me than the first part.¹ While the Bible's unique authorship, complete unity, superior languages, unmatched sales and circulation, and its central theme are magnificent, the six remaining "wonders" possess a certain uniqueness.

VI. Prophetic Accuracy

One of the greatest evidences for the Bible, and one of the hardest for the skeptics to escape, is the number of its prophecies that have been fulfilled. Take the nation of Israel, for example. Ezekiel 36 accurately describes the returning of the Jews to their own land, and this was historically authenticated when Israel became a nation again in 1948. (We will come back to Israel a little later.)

Not only is the Bible specific about the nation of Israel, but it is equally specific about numerous other nations. One of the most important Scripture passages here is Ezekiel 25–37. A case in point is my favorite fulfilled Bible prophecy, the prophecy against Tyre, a great city on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. I marvel at this and love to teach it. Because of its terrible wickedness, Ezekiel 26 declares that Tyre would be utterly destroyed and would *never* again be rebuilt or even inhabited. The prophecy went so far as to say that the city would be scraped clean like the top of a rock, that the stones, timbers, and the very dust of the city would be cast into the sea (Ezek. 26:4–5, 12–14). Now, remember that; we will come back to it in a moment.

A few years later, the Babylonians besieged the city, and after 13 years the walls fell. Ah, but the prophecy was not totally fulfilled, since some of the walls still stood and the city was eventually rebuilt. It appeared that Ezekiel was wrong. 250 years later, however, Alexander the Great finished the job Nebuchadnezzar began. As Alexander waged his war against the Persians, he destroyed the Persian navy by gobbling up ports on the eastern Mediterranean coast. One of these ports was Tyre, with its impregnable walls that had been built on an island half a mile out to sea. How could one conquer a city like that? With arrogance and laughter, in fact, the inhabitants refused Alexander's command to surrender, so he and chief engineer, Diades, hatched a plan that is still amazing on to-

day's standards. They planned to build a half-mile causeway from shore to the island—and here is the important part—*using the walls of the old city as the material*. Alexander's own words were, "Tear down the walls of Tyre, take the timbers and the stones, the rubble and the logs, and cast them into the sea." Sound familiar? Those words were but a paraphrase of the very words of God's prophet Ezekiel. How could Ezekiel get that right hundreds of years before it happened?

But wait—what about today? What is the state of Tyre now? Fisherman use the now flat island as a place to spread their nets for drying and repair, just as Ezekiel 26:5 declares. But what is still there? The causeway.

In contrast to Tyre, there is also a prophecy concerning another city on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Ezekiel 28:21–23 records God's judgment upon the city of Sidon:

Son of man, set thy face against Zidon, and prophesy against it, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Zidon; and I will be glorified in the midst of thee: and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. For I will send into her pestilence, and blood into her streets; and the wounded shall be judged in the midst of her by the sword upon her on every side; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

That is indeed a graphic description, and history confirms it all. Betrayed by its own king, the city was attacked and 40,000 people were killed, but the city itself still stands today.

Consider also the cities of Edom, a nation near the Dead Sea that stood against God's people. Ezekiel declared that the cities would be laid waste and the land would be desolate (Ezek. 35:3–4, 9). Today what used to be Edom is now nothing but desert.

And what about great and mighty Babylon? The Scriptures say much about Babylon, most pointedly that she would be overthrown "as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (Is. 13:19). Where is she today? Only an obscure memory.

Of special interest, however, are the walls of Babylon. Jeremiah 51:58 and 62 declare:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall

be burned with fire; and the people shall labour in vain, and the folk in the fire, and they shall be weary. Then shalt thou say, O LORD, thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off, that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever.

Herodotus (484?–425? BC), the Greek historian who has been called the “Father of History,” tells us that the walls of Babylon were 187 feet thick and 200 feet tall, and had towers that reached up another 100 feet. Where is that wall now? It went back to dust exactly as God said it would and shall never be seen again. Additionally, as Jeremiah wrote:

Because of the wrath of the LORD it shall not be inhabited, but it shall be wholly desolate: every one that goeth by Babylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all her plagues. Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation (Jer. 50:13, 39).

Today Babylon is nothing but a wasteland. In a place that used to be teeming with life and beauty, nothing now survives but a few wild animals. No soothsayer, sage, or psychic can claim this kind of prophetic accuracy.

Turning to another subject, what can the skeptics possibly say about the prophecies of Jesus Christ the Messiah? There are some 300 messianic prophecies in the OT. What are the odds that one man, Jesus Christ, could have fulfilled even *eight* of those? In his famous book, *Science Speaks*, astronomer and mathematician Dr. Peter Stoner did the calculations:

1. Christ to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:4–6): 1 in 280,000.
2. Forerunner of Christ (Mal. 3:1; Mark 1:2–8): 1 in 1,000.
3. Christ to enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:4–11): 1 in 100.
4. Christ to be betrayed by a friend (Ps. 41:9; Luke 22:21): 1 in 1,000.
5. Christ to be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12–13; Matt. 26:15): 1 in 1,000.
6. 30 pieces of silver cast down and used to buy a potter’s field (Zech. 11:13; Matt. 27:3–10): 1 in 100,000.
7. Although innocent, Christ would remain silent when on trial (Isa. 53:7; Mark 14:60–61): 1 in 1,000.
8. Christ crucified (Ps. 22:16; John 19:17, 18): 1 in 10,000.

Now consider what is the probability of *all eight* of those being fulfilled?— 1×10^{28} , that is, 1 with 28 zeros. Stoner goes on to make this practical. Let’s be conservative and say it was only 10^{17} . Suppose we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover the entire state two feet deep. Now mark one of those silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up the marked silver dollar on his first try.

But Scripture declares much more! It says He would be born of the seed of a woman (Gen. 3:15), be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; 49:1; Mic. 5:3), and be a descendant of Shem (Gen.

9:18), Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18), Isaac (Gen. 17:19; 21:12; 26:4), and Jacob (Gen. 28:4–14; Num. 24:17; Is. 49:3). The Scriptures then tell of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Isa. 62:11; Zech. 9:9), His sufferings on the cross, and His death for our sins (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:1–21; Isa. 50:6; 53:1–12; Zech. 13:7). The Scriptures even record details such as the piercing of His hands and feet (Ps. 22:16; Zech. 13:6–7), the casting of lots for His vesture (Ps. 22:18), His embalming and entombment (Ps. 16:10; Isa. 53:9), His resurrection on the third day (portrayed on Pss. 16:10, 17:15, and Jonah 1:17), and His ascension into heaven (Pss. 8:5–6; 110:1). With such accurate knowledge before the fact, how can men reject Him?

Finally, how can man continue in his ways when Scripture plainly outlines the present day apostasy and wickedness? First Timothy 4:1–2, 2 Timothy 3:1–5, and 4:1–3 precisely describe what we see in our world today: the worship of demons and spirits, sinning without conscience or remorse, the love of money, the enthronement of man, the rampant rebellion of children, unholy lifestyles, intemperance, brutality, and total contempt for God and His Word.

VII. The Reality of Israel

The story has been told that Frederick the Great (King of Prussia from 1740 to 1786) was strongly influenced by the atheistic French philosopher Voltaire and became skeptical of Christianity and the reliability of the Bible. Reportedly, he turned to his chaplain and asked, “If your Bible is really true, it ought to be capable of very easy proof. So often, when I’ve asked for proof of the inspiration of the Bible, I’ve been given some tome, that I have neither the time, nor desire, to read. If your Bible is really from God, then you should be able to demonstrate the fact simply. Give me proof for the inspiration of the Bible, in one word.” The chaplain replied, “Your Majesty, it is possible for me to answer your request literally.” Frederick was amazed and said, “What is this magic word that carries such a weight of proof?” He asked. The chaplain replied: “Israel.” Frederick was silent.

We have space only for brief mention, but this is indeed a powerful proof of the veracity not only of Scripture, but also the very character of God. From the moment God made His covenant promise with Abram until now, Israel has been a reality. No matter what Israel did, no matter how rebellious she became, no matter that she even killed her Messiah, this did not alter God’s elective decree, redemptive plan, or literal kingdom fulfillment. Further, through the ages men have tried to destroy Israel. Hitler, for example, murdered six million Jews, but Israel is still here. It is truly puzzling to hear some Bible teachers actually say that the existence of Israel today, as well as the establishment of the Jewish state in Israel means absolutely nothing. Such statements leave me totally flabbergasted.

It is sad indeed that eschatology is such a problem these days, and the reason for that is also sad. It is simply because if one does not get Israel right, he will *never* get eschatology right. There are more than 2,000 references to Israel in Scripture, and every single one of them, without exception, means Israel, not the Church or anything else.

It is not my desire to ruffle anyone’s feathers, but I am convinced that we need to get this right simply because *biblical authority actually depends upon it*.

If I may be even more blunt for a moment, I would humbly submit that so-called Replacement Theology is in reality extremely damaging in at least three ways. First, *hermeneutics* are *diluted* because they are no longer consistent, being literal in some places but spiritual or allegorical in others. Second, as a result of that, *Scripture* itself is *denied* because it no longer means what it says, but rather what we make it say. Third, and as a result of both of those, *God* is *dishonored* because He no longer is going to do exactly what He said He would do when He unconditionally elected His people.

VIII. Archeological Authentication

Another hard blow to the critic and skeptic is the authentication the Bible receives from the archeologist's spade. My favorite example is the uncovering of Pithom, the treasure city built for Rameses II, the Pharaoh of the exodus. When Sir Flinders Petrie uncovered this site, he found something rather odd. He found that some of the sun-baked bricks used in construction were made *with* straw and some were made *without* straw, exactly as recorded in Exodus 5.

At one time, one of the major attacks on the authenticity of the Bible was the lack of evidence that writing existed at the time of Moses. Therefore, since writing didn't even exist at the time of Moses, it was argued, then Moses couldn't possibly have written the Pentateuch. Therefore, according to the critics, the Pentateuch was written four centuries later by four separate authors. This was called the "Documentary Hypothesis." But in 1902 that theory was forever obliterated by one of the most important archeological discoveries ever made, the Code of Hammurabi, discovered by M. J. de Morgan. Hammurabi was king of Babylon about 2000 BC and was, therefore, a contemporary of Abraham (long before Moses). The code contains laws dealing with worship, justice, taxes and other money matters, building, and matters of commerce. The existence of this Code erases all doubt that a well-developed system of writing existed centuries before the time of Moses. Absurdly, however, though thoroughly disproved, the "Documentary Hypothesis" is still taught in liberal schools simply because man does not like truth.

The critics attacked again by saying that Ur of the Chaldees, the city where Abraham lived when God called him, never existed. But thanks to the excavations of C. L. Wooley in 1922–34, Ur is now one of the most well-known of the ancient locations of southern Babylonia. By the time of Abraham, in fact, "it was at the height of its splendor as a commercial and cult center dedicated to the moon-god Nanna. The famous ziggurat, temple, and sacred precincts of the moon-god have been uncovered."²

Archeology has also proven the existence of other cities, such as Petra, and peoples, such as the Hittites, that the critics once accused the Bible of fabricating. One of the most dramatic of these is Jericho. The skeptics scoffed for years at the biblical description of the battle, how the walls fell outward after the people just walked around it; after all, everyone knows that walls fall inward. But then John Garstang, a British archeologist and authority on Hittite civilization, uncovered the ancient site. What did he find? "As for the main fact, there remains no doubt the walls fell outward so completely that the attackers would be able to clamber up over their ruins into the city."³ What a blessing it was to see Jericho during a

Holy Land tour in 2011. I marveled at the sloping red brick walls that collapsed outward during the conquest.

The critics also dismissed the biblical narrative as just being fanciful when it claims that the Israelites marched around the city seven times in one day, something that simply isn't realistic; how could someone walk around Denver seven times in a day? But again, they were silenced when Garstang discovered that the city was extremely crowded and comprised only about six acres.⁴

We find one of the most blessed examples of the testimony of archeology in the experiences of Sir William Ramsey (1851–1939), the well-known archeologist. Ramsey set out with one goal in mind, to disprove the Book of Acts. He remained open-minded, however, and his hundreds of discoveries convinced him of the historicity of Acts and Luke's meticulous authorship of it. Ramsey even became a Christian himself and published several books.⁵

IX. Scientific Accuracy

Similar to archeological authentication, we also see the Bible's scientific accuracy. It has often been said that while the Bible is certainly not a textbook of science, it is still accurate when it speaks on scientific subjects.

We could get into many things here, but as an amateur astronomer, my favorite examples are those that fall into that field. In fact, the Bible has much to say about this subject. For example, most everyone can point out the Big Dipper, which is actually part of a larger group of stars called Ursa Major, the Great Bear. Orion, which contains my favorite deep space object (the Orion nebulae, M42), is a winter constellation that dominates the sky. Then there is the beautiful open star cluster Pleiades, often called "The Seven Sisters," in the constellation Taurus. We group these together because Scripture does so: "[God] maketh Arcturus [or the Bear], Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south" (Job 9:9). "Chambers of the south" refers to constellations in the southern hemisphere, unnamed here because they could not be seen in the northern hemisphere. Amos 5:8 also declares: Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion." Who put all that in the sky?

Also, did you know that it is only from our position on an outer arm of the Milky Way Galaxy that these constellations are visible? They are not definable from any other perspective in the galaxy. Is there anything in the universe more foolish than believing that this universe did not have a designer, that it all started with a big bang and evolved randomly?

Isn't it also interesting that there was a time when the world thought men who believed that the earth was round were crazy (even heretics)? But God told men this thousands of years ago when He revealed to Isaiah: "It is [God] that sitteth upon the circle of the earth . . ." (Isa. 40:22).

Another fascinating verse appears in Job 26:7: "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing." Expositors who think this refers to a "hole" in the north are in error. Modern telescopes reveal a profusion of stars in the north that can't be seen with the naked eye. Actually, the verse doesn't refer just to the northern part of the *sky* but to the *whole earth*. It reveals what it took man millennia to discover on his own, that the earth hangs in space. This was vividly seen by the whole world in 1968 when the crew of Apollo 8 took the now famous photograph "Earth

Rise," which shows the Moon below in the foreground and that magnificent blue ball, the only color in the universe, hanging in a sea of blackness nearly a quarter of a million miles away.

Speaking of the Moon, it again took man centuries to understand the Moon and what it does, how it divides the time into months. But the Psalmist tells us plainly that God "appointed the moon for seasons" (Ps. 104:19; cf. Gen. 1:14).

Likewise, as God created the Moon to rule the night and divided time into months, He created the Sun to rule the day and divide time into days (Gen. 1:14; Ps. 136:7-9). Over its entire surface, the Sun radiates about 70,000 horsepower per square yard every second. To put that in perspective, in the time it took me to say that, the Sun consumed 12 million tons of gasses. If we used the Earth's fuels at that rate, they would be gone in about four minutes, but the Sun's resources are so great that in a million years it will have been scarcely diminished at all. God guarantees that the Sun will burn in space as long as life remains on the Earth.

Then think how vast the universe is! I truly hope you are awed when you look up into space, especially when you meditate on verses such as these:

Is not God in the height of heaven? and behold the height of the stars, how high they are! (Job 22:12)

It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. (Isa. 40:22)

Who of us hasn't sat on a clear summer evening and looked up to see the "veil" of stars in God's Milky Way? How many of us have not pondered how vast this universe is?

Ponder a couple of examples. We know that light travels at 186,282 miles per second (which is 670,615,200 miles an hour!) and that the distance it takes light to travel in one year (nearly 6 trillion miles) is called a "light year." Practically, this means that if we could travel at the speed of light, it would still take us 4.262 years to reach Proxima Centauri, the closest star to the earth other than the Sun. Going out from there, Arcturus is 37 light years away, Spica is about 200 light years away, and Deneb is 1,500 light years away. And these stars, and billions more, are just part of *our* galaxy, which itself is almost 100,000 light years in diameter.

If we could then leave our galaxy and travel to our nearest neighbor, the Andromeda galaxy (M31), which is almost twice the size of the Milky Way (180,000 light-years in diameter), it would take us 2,200,000 light years to get there. These two galaxies are part of the Local Group, of which there are about 20, but beyond these there are apparently hundreds of billions more. One such group is a cluster of galaxies in the constellation Coma Berenices. Astronomers believe that this group is about 40 million light-years away.

But even these distant galaxies do not seem to be the border of the universe. The farthest objects that have been discovered are the quasi-stellar objects, or "quasars" for short. A quasar has even more energy than a galaxy. It is believed that they are as much as five billion light-years distant and that they are traveling *away* from us at as much as 80% of the speed of light (approximately 148,000 miles per second).

There is so much more we could say, but we are left sitting

in awe as we remember the words from the psalmist: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Ps. 8:3-4). "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (19:1).

I shall not forget the first deep space object I ever saw through a 4-inch telescope in February 1985. It was the Orion nebula, M42, in Orion's belt, and I was hooked forever. I have been considering the heavens ever since and rejoice in how it all declares God's glory.

X. Timeless Age

Any piece of written material we pick up today is anything but timeless. A newsmagazine is outdated the next week, a medical journal is outdated with the next discovery, a newspaper is outdated the next day, a novel is only a best seller for a few weeks or months. On the other hand, there are classics that have been around much longer, such as the works of Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, Herman Melville, and others. But the Word of God is *timeless*. It is as up to date now as when it was first penned. It is as accurate, authoritative, appropriate, and applicable as it ever was.

XI. Indestructibility

Finally, the Bible has proven itself to be absolutely indestructible. Let us note again these words from the lips of our Lord Himself: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18). "Jot" refers to the Hebrew letter *yod*, one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. "Tittle" means horn and refers to the smallest stroke of a Hebrew letter. Our Lord is saying that not even the smallest letter or stroke of the pen will pass away until every word of God's Word accomplishes its purpose. This assurance has been proven repeatedly through the ages in at least three ways.

First, the Bible has survived time. This is an amazing fact. I have been studying the textual and Bible translation issue for more than 20 years, and the first thing one learns is how the manuscripts have survived the ravages of time. Naturally, the Scriptures were recorded on corruptible material, so they were copied and recopied down through the centuries. Due to its great antiquity, copies of the Old Testament are few in comparison with the New Testament. Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in fact, there were only about 735 copies. The very important discovery of the Scrolls, however, added a few hundred more, including almost every book of the Old Testament.

In contrast to this, there are more than 5,200 Greek manuscripts that attest to the New Testament. This is an astounding number when compared with the second most attested Greek work, namely, the 643 extant manuscripts of Homer's *Iliad*. In spite of this vast number, however, with only a few exceptions, the accurate reading of every verse has been settled. Any remaining disputes come from the *interpretation* of the words rather than the words themselves. Besides the manuscripts themselves, more than 86,000 quotations of individual verses by early Christians have also been found, dating from within 150-200 years of the time of Christ.

Second, the Bible has survived direct attack. How many

foolish men have tried to destroy the Word of God! Diocletian (c. 303), the worst of the Roman emperors, published his edict to burn the Scriptures. Not only did the edict fail, but Diocletian's successor (Constantine) 25 years later commissioned the church historian Eusebius to prepare 50 copies of the Scriptures at government expense.

The story has been told often of the French philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778) who held up a Bible and said, "In 50 years I'll have this book in the morgue." Well, in 50 years *he* was in the morgue and the Geneva Bible Society owned his house and used it as a place to store Bibles that they first printed on his press.

Third, the Bible has survived critical attack. In man's ever increasing rebellion, when he can't *destroy* the Bible, he will try to *discredit* it. In the 17th-century, there developed the "science" of "Lower (Textual) Criticism," which actually came first and cast a doubt on the text of Scripture. From the first textual critic in the Garden of Eden (Satan, who asked, "Is that what God really said?") until the present day, textual criticism has done enormous damage. Later, flowing out of that came "Higher (or Historical) Criticism,"⁶ which was a scholarly attack on the date, literary style, structure, historicity, and authorship of books of the Bible.

But God's Word endures. No matter what man tries to do, no matter what he says, God's Word lives on and God's purpose marches on. While the number is growing fewer, there are still those today who are standing for the integrity, veracity, and trustworthiness of the text of Scripture. A motto I adopted several years ago from the late ecclesiastical scholar Dr. Theodore Letis is: "The text is always the issue."

Well, we will stop there. I would close by saying that this study was not designed to be an apologetic argument. Its purpose has not been to *prove* the Word of God or even *defend* the Word of God. As Charles Spurgeon once said, "I would as soon defend a lion." No, this study was meant to bless our hearts as to the uniqueness of God's Word. We hold in our hands the very Word of the Living God, a Word that is eternal, reliable, authoritative, and sufficient.

Dr. J. D. Watson
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NOTES

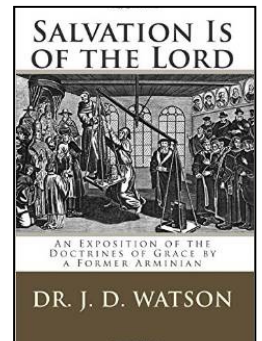
- ¹ Please excuse our tardiness in getting out this issue of TOTT. This was due to a relocation of the author's home and ministry.
- ² Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 20.
- ³ Cited by Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernadino: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972), 71.
- ⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 573.
- ⁵ Josh McDowell cites Ramsey's conversion in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernidino: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972), 72. Some of Ramsey's books include: *Pictures of the Apostolic Church*, *Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, and *Historical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*.
- ⁶ Charles L. Feinberg (Editor), *The Fundamentals for Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1961), 14.

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